

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8192

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E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CO
SUBJECT: ELECTION FORECASTS: PRELIMINARY PROJECTIONS FOR THE
JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: BOGOTA 3836

1. SUMMARY: THE CURRENT OUTLOOK FOR THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS FOR LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATE JULIO CESAR TURBAY TO DEFEAT HIS CONSERVATIVE RIVAL, BELISARIO BETANCUR, BY 300-500,000 VOTES. VOTER TURNOUT WILL PROBABLY NOT BE MUCH LARGER THAN THAT OF THE FEBRUARY CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION. EARLIER ESTIMATES BY MOST OBSERVERS, INCLUDING TURBAY LIBERALS, MIGHT HAVE BEEN MODIFIED DOWNWARD AS THE PROSPECT OF A BIGGER ELECTORAL TURNOUT, AND FOLLOWING EXTENDED TELEVISION APPEARANCES BY ALL OF THE CANDIDATES IN WHICH TURBAY CAME ACROSS AS LESS ATTRACTIVE AND EXCITING THAN BETANCUR, AND IN WHICH INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE RETIRED GENERAL ALVARO VALENCIA TOVAR EVOKED MORE POPULAR INTEREST AND SYMPATHY THAN EITHER. VALENCIA'S EXPECTED 5-10 PERCENT OF THE VOTE WILL TEND TO BE DRAWN MORE FROM POTENTIAL TURBAY SUPPORTERS. THE COMBINED VOTE OF THE VARIOUS LEFTIST PARTIES WILL PROBABLY NOT EXCEED 5-6 PERCENT. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES ALIKE ARE LOOKING AHEAD TO THE
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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WITH HOPEFUL ANTICIPATION. THE LIBERAL PARTY, NOW DOMINATED BY THE SUPPORTERS OF JULIO CESAR TURBAY, IS CONFIDENT OF VICTORY AFTER TURBAY'S OVERWHELMING TRIUMPH OVER HIS CHALLENGER FOR THE PARTY'S NOMINATION, EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS. THE CONSERVATIVES ARE HOPEFUL RATHER THAN CONFIDENT, THEIR EXPECTATIONS BUMMED BY WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS CONTINUING LIBERAL DISAFFECTION AMONG EX-LLERISTAS AS WELL AS BY WHAT THEY CONSIDER

BETANCUR'S GOOD APPEAL OUTSIDE THE PARTY. REFLECTING THE VIEWS OF MANY CONSERVATIVES, ONE OF BETANCUR'S CLOSE AIDES REMARKED RECENTLY "IF WE DON'T WIN THIS ONE, WE WILL HAVE MISSED THE BEST CHANCE THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY WILL HAVE FOR A HUNDRED YEARS."

3. IN THE ABSENCE OF CREDIBLE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, MOST PREDICTIONS FOR JUNE 4 ARE BASED ON THE OUTCOME OF THE FEBRUARY 26 CONGRESSIONAL (ANF FOR THE LIBERALS, QUASI PRIMARY) ELECTIONS. COMPLETE BUT STILL UNOFFICIAL RETURNS FOR THESE ELECTIONS FOLLOW:

LIBERALS - TURBAY LISTS 1,441,000

LLERAS LISTS: 673,000

INDEPENDENTS: 93,000

LIBERAL TOTAL: 2,207,000

CONSERVATIVES (BOTH FACTIONS SUPPORTER BETANCUR)

CONSERVATIVE TOTAL: 1,603,000

LEFTIST PARTIES TOTAL: 195,000

4. CONSERVATIVES ARE NOT DISHEARTENED THAT THESE DATA BEAR OUT WHAT EVERYONE KNOWS: THAT THERE ARE MORE LIBERALS THAN CONSERVATIVES IN COLOMBIA. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, BETANCUR OFFERED THE FOLLOWING CALCULATIONS (HE HAS PRESENTED FAR MORE OPTIMISTIC PROJECTIONS IN PRIVATE MEETINGS WITH PROSPECTIVE CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTORS) OF HOW HE THOUGHT HE COULD WIN; THE TOTAL TURNOUT WOULD NOT BE APPRECIABLY LARGER THAN THAT OF FEBRUARY. THE ADDED INTEREST AND DRAMA OF A PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST WOULD BE OFFSET TO A LARGE EXTENT BY THE ABSENCE IN JUNE OF THE INTENSIVE

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ACTIVITY WHICH WAS CONDUCTED IN FEBRUARY BY THOUSANDS OF CANDIDATES FOR BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS, MUNICIPAL COUNCILS AND DEPARTMENT ASSEMBLIES, IN THEIR OWN BEHALVES BUT WHICH ALSO BENEFITED THE PARTIES. THIS PHENOMENON, BETANCUR SAID, WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT BOTH PARTIES BUT LESS SO THE CONSERVATIVES, WHO ARE TRADITIONALLY THE MORE DISCIPLINED VOTERS. FURTHERMORE, HE WENT ON, FOR THE LIBERALS THE FEBRUARY ELECTION HAD THE ADDED INTEREST OF A PRIMARY FIGHT BETWEEN TWO PROSPECTIVE NOMINEES. FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, THEREFORE, THE FEBRUARY 1.6 MILLION FIGURE WAS A MINIMUM BASE FOR JUNE WHILE THAT OF THE LIBERALS WAS SOFT. BETANCUR COUNTED ON CONTINUING DISSATISFACTION AMONG LLERISTAS, WITH ONLY ABOUT HALF TURNING OUT FOR TURBAY AND A MINIMUM OF 100 THOUSAND VOTING FOR BETANCUR. HE ALSO COUNTED ON SOME MINIMUM ELECTORAL SUPPORT FROM THE ANAPO, PERHAPS 150 THOUSAND. IN ADDITION, HE ALSO COUNTED ON HIS POPULIST ("SOCIALLY CONCERNED") IMAGE TO SHAKE LOOSE SOME HABITUAL ABSTENTIONISTS AS WELL AS LIBERALS WHO ARE NOT HAPPY WITH TURBAY'S CONSERVATIVE APPROACH. FIGURING "CONSERVATIVELY," HE THOUGHT THAT HE COULD DEFEAT TURBAY BY AROUND 200 THOUSAND VOTES.

5. LIBERALS, ON THE OTHER HAND, SAY THAT THE JUNE CONSERVATIVE VOTE WILL PROBABLY NOT EXCEED BETANCUR'S TURNOUT IN FEBRUARY.

WHILE THE FEBRUARY VOTE WAS NOT A PRIMARY FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, THEY POINT OUT THAT THE CONSERVATIVES HAD THEIR OWN INTEREST-BUILDING INTRAPARTY FIGHT (NOT OVER THE NOMINATION, BUT FOR CONTROL OF THE PARTY) BETWEEN THE RIVAL FACTIONS. ANAPO WILL BRING BELISARIO ONLY NEGLIGIBLE ELECTORAL SUPPORT. WHILE A HANDFUL OF EX-LLERISTA CHIEFTAINS MAY REMAIN SULKING IN THEIR TENTS, MOST OF THEIR GRASS ROOTS FOLLOWERS HAVE ALREADY RALLIED TO THE PARTY. FURTHERMORE, IN THIS HEAD-TO-HEAD CONTEST WITH THE CONSERVATIVES, THE LIBERALS ARE EVOKING THE HISTORIC LIBERAL PARTY LOYALTIES ("LIBERAL, VOTE LIBERAL") AS WELL AS FEARS OF A CONSERVATIVE VICTORY AND A RETURN TO CONSERVATIVE OPPRESSION PRIOR TO AND GENERAL BLOODLETTING DURING THE 1948-53 VIOLENCIA. THE MORE MODEST LIBERAL CLAIMS ARE FOR A HALF MILLION MARGIN OVER BETANCUR.

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6. THE EMBASSY'S ASSESSMENT IS THAT TURBAY WILL BEAT BETANCUR BY 300-500,000 VOTES. WE SHARE BETANCUR'S VIEW THAT THE JUNE TURNOUT MAY NOT BE MUCH GREATER THAN IN FEBRUARY, ESSENTIALLY FOR THE REASONS HE GAVE. OUR SURVEYS INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT DEFECTIONS TO BETANCUR BY FORMER LLERAS SUPPORTERS WILL NOT BE SIGNIFICANT. WHILE SOME OF THESE MAY NOT VOTE AT ALL, VERY FEW WILL VIOLATE OLD LOYALTIES AND VOTE CONSERVATIVE. LIKEWISE, VERY FEW FORMER ANAPO SUPPORTERS ARE LIKELY TO VOTE BETANCUR. SOME OF THE MORE PRESTIGIOUS FORMER ANAPO LEADERS ARE SOLDIERING IN THE MOSCOW- OR

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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PEKING-ORIENTED EXTERME LEFTIST GROUPINGS WHERE, AS THE FEBRUARY RESULTS SHOWED, FEW ANAPO VOTERS FOLLOWED THEM. HOWEVER, THEIR ATTACKS ON MARIA EUGENIA ROJAS FOR JOINING WITH HER FATHER'S HIS-TORIC ENEMIES IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY WILL PROBABLY BE EFFECTIVE IN FORESTALLING ANY APPRECIABLE FLOW TO BETANCUR OF ERSTWHILE ANAPO VOTERS. IN THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, BEFORE THE DEFECTIONS TO THE TWO LEFTIST GROUPS, MARIA EUGENIA WON LESS THAN A HALF MILLION VOTES, COMPARED WITH THE 1.56 MILLION HER FATHER WON IN 1970. IN THE 1976 MID-TERM ELECTIONS, ANAPO VOTES DROPPED TO 109,000.

7. THE SILENT MAJORITY. HISTORICALLY, VOTER TURNOUT IN COLOMBIA HAS BEEN GREATER AT TIMES OF GREAT NATIONAL CHOICES, SUCH AS THE 1957 NATIONAL FRONT PLEBISCITE OF THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, WHICH WAS THE FIRST IN TWENTY YEARS TO BE FREELY CONTESTED BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES. THERE ARE NO SUCH CHOICES OR ISSUES FACING VOTERS THIS YEAR, NOR DOES EITHER OF THE TWO PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES POSSESS THE DEGRJE OF CHARISMA THAT WOULD ELECTRIFY THOSE CMLOM-BIANS WHO STAYED HOME ON FEBRUARY 26. THE INTRODUCTION BY LIBERALS AS A SUBLIMINAL ISSUE OF A RETURN TO THE EVIL DAYS OF VIMLENCE AND GMVERNMENT BY THE SPIRIT OF LAUREANO GOMEZ SEEMS TO BE HAVING THE EFFECT OF KEEPING REGULAR LIBERAL VOTERS IN LINE WHO, OUT OF COOLNESS OVER TURBAY, MIGHT OTHERWISE STAY HOME, OR WHO MIGHT BY TEMPTED TO VOTE FOR BETANCUR OR GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR.

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8. THE GENERAL. RETIRED GENERAL ALVARO VALENCIA TOVAR'S CANDIDACY IS SOMETHING OF AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY, SINCE HIS NEWLY CREATED MOVEMENT FOR NATIONAL RENEWAL WAS NOT REPRESENTED IN THE FEBRUARY 26 ELECTION. HE APPEARS TO HAVE ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST AND SYMPATHY AMONG MANY VOTERS, MOSTLY LIBERALS WHO ARE NOT INVOLVED IN THE PARTY'S MACHINERY. FORMER GENERALS NORMALLY WOULD HAVE LITTLE APPEAL IN COLOMBIA'S CIVIL-ORIENTED SOCIETY. VALENCIA, HOWEVER IS NOT A TYPICAL GENERAL. AN INTELLECTUAL, HE IS ARTICU-LATE, CONVINCING AND POLITICALLY MODERATE. THERE IS NO QUESTION OF HIS COMING CLOSE TO WINNING BUT HE COULD ATTRACT ENOUGH LIBERAL VOTES TO REDUCE TURBAY'S WINNING MARGIN. HANDICAPPERS ALLOW HIM 200-400,000 VOTES. ANYTHING SIGNIFICANTLY OVER 200,000 WOULF REPRE-SENT A SIGNIFICANT PROTEST VOTE, AND COULD ASSIST VALENCIA IN HIS PROBABLE FURTHER AIM TO PRESENT A STRONG CANDIDACY IN 1982. VALENCIA HAS NO PARTY BEHIND HIM AND POSSESSES ONLY A SCATTERED, VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION WITH LITTLE FINANCIAL SUPPORT. HIS CANDIDACY IS LARGLY BASED ON HIS TV PRESENTATIONS, IN WHICH HE HAS APPEARED TO GOOD ADVANTAGE COMPARED WITH THE GENERALLY PEDESTRIAN PERFORMANCES OF THE OTHER CANDIDATES. WHILE SUCH A CANDIDACY IS NOT LIKELY TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON COLOMBIA'S BASICALLY TWO-PARTY SYSTEM, IT COULD HELP DETERMINE THE OUTCOME BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR CANDI-DATES IF THE CONST IS MORE CLOSELY DRAWN THAN EXPECTED.

9. PUBLIC ORDER. EXCEPT FOR POSSIBLE SCATTERED INCIDENTS PRO-
VOOKED BY SMALL EXTERMINIST GROUPS, THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE LIKELI-
HOOD OF SIGNIFICANT VIOLENCE OR LABOR UNREST ON ELECTION DAY.
THE LEFTIST PARTIES AND THE LARGER GUERRILLA GROUPS SUPPORT ONE
OR ANOTHER OF THE LEFTIST CANDIDATES AND ARE NOT LIKELY TO TRY
TO DISRUPT THE ELECTIONS. MOST UNION LEADERS ARE ALSO COMMITTED
TO ONE OF THE VARIOUS CANDIDATES, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE TWO
TRADITIONAL PARTIES. THE UNIONS ARE NOW TALKING ABOUT RENEWING
LARGE SCALE LABOR AFFILIATION AFTER THE NEW ADMINISTRATION TAKES
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OFFICE ON AUGUST 7.

10. THE EMBASSY WILL SUBMIT AN UPDATED PROJECTION ON THE ELECTION
PRIOR TO JUNE 4.

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